DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 598 HE 017 322

AUTHOR Keller, Michael J.; McKeown, Mary P.
TITLE Factors Contributing to the Postsecondary Enrollment Decisions of Maryland National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists. ASHE 1984 Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (Chicago, IL, March 12-14, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; *College Choice; Colleges; Decision Making; *Enrollment Influences; Higher Education; High School Students; In State Students; *Institutional Characteristics; Out of State Students; Postsecondary Education; Private Colleges; Public Education; Reputation; State Surveys; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting; *Maryland; National Merit Scholars

ABSTRACT

Factors that 1983 National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists in Maryland felt influenced their college choice were studied. The 143 survey respondents were asked to indicate how important 22 factors were in the selection of a college. The factors covered items dealing with the characteristics of the college, efforts by the institution to contact students, and influential persons in the lives of the students. Respondents were also asked to estimate the proportion of first-year college costs (tuition and fees, room and board) that would be covered by the financial aid package offered by their college. The reasons that appeared to be instrumental in attracting the greatest number of students were related to perceived strengths of the institution and how well the institution serves its graduates. The following reasons were cited most frequently (in ascending order of frequency): the overall reputation of the school, the attractiveness of the program in the students's major, the success of the graduates in finding a job or getting into graduate or professional school, and the quality of the student body at the institution. Data are included on the responses of students who chose public and private colleges and those of students who went to out-of-state schools. In addition, students' reasons were compared by sex and race. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED245598

Not for attribution
or quotation without
permission.

Factors Contributing to the Postsecondary Enrollment Decisions of Maryland National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists

Michael J. Keller
Mary P. McKeown
Maryland State Board for Higher Education

March, 1984

Presented at the 1984 Annual Meeting of the
Association for the Study of Higher Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael J. Keller

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE 017 322

ASHE Association for the Study of Higher Education
The George Washington University/One Dupont Circle, Suite 630/Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 296-2597

This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, March 12-14, 1984. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Factors Contributing to the Postsecondary Enrollment Decisions of Maryland National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists

Michael J. Keller and Mary P. McKeown
Maryland State Board for Higher Education

For many colleges and universities, the problems of enrollment management brought on by anticipated declines in the number of youth 18 to 25 years old are overshadowed by the prospect of an even steeper drop in the supply of academically talented high school graduates. The number of students who scored 650 or higher on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) fell by almost half since 1972, and the number who scored in this range on the math section of the SAT declined by nearly a fourth. Demand for this dwindling pool of top high school graduates has fueled keen competition among institutions similar in spirit, if not intensity, to the effort to recruit quality athletes. Colleges that do otherwise risk losing their best prospects. Scholastically gifted students generally begin the application process before their high school contemporaries, consider a wider range of institutions, and make their selections at an earlier date (Litten, 1982).

A college's skill in wooing top students is important, since the reputation of an institution is based in part on the college's ability to attract undergraduates with strong scholastic credentials. One of the traditional indicators of institutional quality has been student body calibre, and quality assessment studies done in recent years have emphasized the qualifications of entering freshmen.

Hence, many schools have initiated special efforts to recruit high ability students, offering lucrative merit scholarships and providing prospective new students with celebrity-style trips to the campus. However, no evidence has been advanced to demonstrate that such strategies are effective in attracting students with outstanding records. Because of the expense involved in these recruiting campaigns and the diversion of financial aid funds from need-based awards, college administrators would benefit from knowing the factors that were most important in the decisions of high ability students to select particular colleges. Especially helpful to administrators and others involved in policy decisions regarding student financial aid programs would be a determination of the considerations that motivated students to attend a public rather than a private institution, or an in-state college rather than an out-of-state school.

Knowledge of the extent to which various types of academically bright students are dependent on or influenced by financial aid packages would be helpful to institutions in setting priorities for the distribution of these funds. Indeed the director of the Washington office of the College Board has condemned the practice of merit awards to high ability students because scarce financial aid funds would be "siphoned off" of need-based assistance (Washington Post, 1984).

The objective of this study was to identify the factors that 1983 National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists in Maryland felt influenced their selection of a college or university. Responses to a survey of Maryland's 1983 National Merit and National Achievement

Semifinalists were analyzed both on the basis of the overall findings and on the basis of the type (private or public) and location (in-state or out-of-state) of the institution selected by the student, the size of the financial aid package received by the students, and the sex and race of the students. National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists were targeted in this analysis because these students are a highly visible source of talented high school students and comprise a group eagerly sought by colleges.

While extensive examinations of the reasons why students attend or do not attend college have been made, less attention has been given to the reasons high school seniors have for selecting a particular school (See Maguire, 1981, for example). Noting that little theory exists to guide research investigations of college choice, Chapman (1981) developed a model which postulates that a senior's selection of a postsecondary institution is influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with extended influences, including the impact of significant persons (family, friends, and teachers or counselors), attributes of the college (location, costs, campus environment, and desired programs), and the school's efforts to communicate with prospective students. Although acknowledging the usefulness of the Chapman model, Litten (1982) suggested that an understanding of how the college selection process differs for various subgroups of students is essential if administrators are to make economically efficient decisions regarding student recruitment.

Research on the factors influencing the college choices of academically talented high school seniors has been even more limited. Higgins (1982) found differences in the characteristics and higher education choices of 1981 Indiana National Merit Scholars and those of other college-bound students in the State. Tierney (1983) concluded that more able students chose more selective institutions and tended to be more concerned with information about academic programs, less interested in campus appearance, and more sophisticated regarding financial issues in the choice of a college than students of less ability. Douglas, Powers, and Choroszy (1983) reported that the academic quality of an institution was the most important feature in attracting intellectually gifted students.

Method

A questionnaire containing a list of 22 possible reasons for a student's decision to attend an institution of higher education was developed by the Maryland State Board for Higher Education for this study. Validation of the instrument had been completed for previous studies. Survey participants were asked to indicate how important the 22 factors were in the choice of a college. The factors covered items dealing with the characteristics of the college, efforts by the institution to contact students, and influential persons in the lives of the students. It was possible to list additional reasons for choosing an institution, but few respondents did so.

Survey participants also were asked to approximate the proportion of first year college costs (tuition and fees, room and board) that would be covered by the financial aid package offered by the college they selected. Questionnaires, accompanied by a letter from the Maryland Commissioner of Higher Education, were mailed May 1, 1983 to all 344 Maryland high school seniors who were named 1983 National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists; surveys were sent to the students in care of their high schools. The survey was conducted at the end of the schools' academic year in order to maximize the number of students who had firm college plans; however, this arrangement precluded a followup mailing. Two questionnaires were returned as undeliverable. Of the remaining Semifinalists, surveys were returned by 143 students for a response rate of 43 percent.

Limitations

Two conditions of the survey are important in the interpretation of the results. First, since the study dealt with National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists in one year and in one state, the findings of the survey are not necessarily representative of all academically talented college-bound students. Further, because of the relatively low rate of participation in the survey, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to all 1983 Maryland Merit Semifinalists.

Nonetheless, the responses to the survey items are consistent with responses obtained in studies conducted by the Maryland State Board for Higher Education in previous years. In some previous years, the response rate was higher. In addition, there was strong congruence between the respondent group and all 1983 Maryland

Semifinalists on the two characteristics for which comparison was possible (sex and the county of the student's high school). Table 1 provides information on the sex and on the county of a student's high school for respondents and for all Maryland Semifinalists. The data indicate that women comprise a larger percentage of the respondents than of the total pool of Semifinalists. By county of residence, the respondents are representative of the total group of Semifinalists.

A second possible limitation is that many students may have difficulty identifying the factors that were influential in the choice of a particular school. The process of choosing a college involves multiple considerations, some of which may not be reported easily on a structured questionnaire. Further, some students may have used the survey to offer rationalizations which seemed attractive for their reasons for attendance at a particular campus.

Results

Table 2 displays the percentage of Semifinalists who deemed each factor to be very important, somewhat important, or not important to their decision to attend a particular college or university. The items are ranked in order of the mean score. The reasons that appeared to be instrumental in attracting the greatest number of students were related to perceived strengths of the institution and how well the institution serves its graduates: the overall reputation of the school (75 percent rated as "very important"), the attractiveness of the program in the

student's major (68 percent), the success of the graduates in finding a job or getting into graduate or professional school (54 percent), and the quality of the student body at the institution (54 percent). More than forty percent of the respondents emphasized the appearance or atmosphere of the campus and the student/faculty ratio, while 39 percent cited contacts by the college. Religious considerations, having friends at the college, or being close to home were considered "not important" by more than 80 percent of the Semifinalists.

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 present the responses of Semifinalists on the basis of the type and location of their institution, their sex, and their race. Statistical comparisons, using the Chi-square test of significance, were made. The standard 0.05 level of significance was used.

Table 3 displays data comparing the responses of students who chose public and private colleges. Relatively low costs were more important to the decisions of Semifinalists who selected a public college or university while characteristics of the student body were more integral in the choices of individuals who attended a private institution. Most of the respondents (51 percent) who were enrolling at public colleges or universities cited low tuition costs as a very important reason for their choice- a larger percentage than any other factor except reputation of the school and the quality of the academic program. In contrast, only six percent of the students selecting a private institution considered tuition expenses to be very important to their decisions. Attending college close to home and having friends at the

same college were very important reasons to more Semifinalists who selected public than private schools, 18 percent vs 2 percent and 6 percent vs 1 percent respectively.

On the other hand, a greater proportion of the Semifinalists who chose a private college or university deemed the following reasons to be very important in their selection of a higher education institution: the quality of the student body (63 percent compared to 24 percent), the size of the student body (43 percent vs. 6 percent), and the student/faculty ratio (47 percent vs. 21 percent).

A substantial majority (85 percent) of the Semifinalists who went out-of-state for postsecondary education attended a private institution while almost two-thirds (65 percent) of those who remained in Maryland enrolled in a public college or university. Hence, the differences between the responses of students who attended an in-state or out-of-state institution were similar to those of Semifinalists who selected a public or private school respectively.

Table 4 displays data comparing the responses of students who chose Maryland and out-of-state institutions. Lower tuition costs were a very important consideration for a larger percentage of Semifinalists who selected a Maryland institution than for those who enrolled out-of-state (48 percent vs. 10 percent). However, attributes of the student body were more influential in recruiting students to out-of-state than to Maryland colleges; a greater proportion of the Semifinalists who

left Maryland for their postsecondary studies than those who attended a State institution rated as "very important" the quality of the student body (61 percent vs. 19 percent), the size of the student body (36 percent vs. 23 percent), and the student/faculty ratio (45 percent vs. 21 percent).

Familiarity with the school was a more important consideration among Semifinalists who selected a Maryland rather than an out-of-state college or university. More than one-fourth (27 percent) of those who enrolled in a Maryland school reported that they did so largely because "they knew more about it than other colleges;" in contrast, six percent of the students who went out-of-Maryland stressed this reason. As might be expected, more of the Semifinalists who selected a Maryland institution were influenced apparently by the opportunity to attend school closer to home (26 percent), while a greater percentage of the students who left Maryland for postsecondary education (28 percent) indicated that living away from home was a very important ingredient in their choice of a college.

Table 5 compares the responses of men and women, while Table 6 compares the responses to the survey for Semifinalists who are black or white. In general, there were few striking differences between the responses of men and women, and between blacks and whites. A larger percentage of women than men Semifinalists cited parental influence and familiarity with their institution as very important reasons for selecting their college. A greater proportion of black than white Semifinalists (44 percent vs. 29 percent) suggested that a better financial aid offer was a very important factor in their determination of a school.

Except for blacks and whites, no statistically significant differences between the responses of Semifinalists by subgroup with regard to the importance of a financial aid offer were found. However, students enrolling at public and Maryland institutions placed markedly greater emphasis on lower tuition costs and 29 percent of the respondents identified their financial aid offer as a very important reason for their college decision. Consequently, an examination was made of the proportion of the Semifinalists' college costs supported by financial assistance. Semifinalists were asked to approximate the proportion of their first year college costs (tuition, fees, room and board) that would be met by the financial aid arrangement the students had been offered by the colleges of their choice. Tables 7 and 8 display this information.

The figures in Table 7 suggest that high ability students who selected a Maryland or, to a lesser extent, a public institution, had a greater percentage of their freshman year expenses covered by financial aid than did their counterparts who chose an out-of-state or private school. Nearly half (49 percent) of the Semifinalists who planned to attend a Maryland college or university reported that their financial aid package would cover more than half of their college expenses, compared to 34 percent for out-of-state students ($x^2 = 86.51$, $p<.001$). Nearly one out of every five students attending a Maryland college and about one-fourth of the Semifinalists who were enrolling at a public institution indicated that all of their college costs would be met by financial assistance.

Although no significant differences on the basis of sex were found, women had a slightly larger proportion of their educational expenses supported by financial assistance. A sharper distinction existed between blacks and whites: most blacks (51 percent) reported that more than half of their freshman year expenses were met by financial aid, compared to 36 percent among whites ($x^2 = 42.44$, $p<.001$).

It might be expected that Semifinalists whose college expenses were reduced substantially by financial assistance would be more attracted to an institution by its aid offer or by lower tuition. The data in Table 9 suggest that this may have been partly true. Those students who were receiving large amounts, proportionally, of financial assistance tended to consider their aid package a key determinant of their college choice. An overwhelming majority (85 percent) of the Semifinalists whose aid met more than 25 percent of their educational expenses cited a better financial assistance offer as a very important reason for selecting a school. In contrast, only 11 percent of the students whose aid covered 25 percent or less of their first-year costs considered a financial aid offer to be very important ($x^2 = 59.35$, $p<.001$). However, virtually no difference between the amount of financial aid Semifinalists received and the importance they placed on lower tuition was reported.

Discussion

The results of this study may assist college officials in mapping strategies to attract high ability students. The implications of the findings for Maryland's postsecondary institutions are particularly great. Maryland's colleges and universities, especially those in the public sector, have had difficulty attracting academically talented students, as evidenced by the migration of National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists to out-of-state schools. These youths are not replaced in Maryland colleges by high ability students from other states.

Although this study deals exclusively with Maryland students, its findings are generally consistent with other research on the college choices of scholastically gifted students. The survey responses confirm the wisdom of Litten's contention that institutions need to apply market segmentation principles to their student recruitment activities. The reasons that seniors gave for selecting a private or public institution show that a uniform strategy for attracting National Merit or National Achievement Semifinalists may not be adequate. Institutions need to tailor their efforts to fit the type of school they represent and the kind of student they seek to enroll. The results of this study suggest several actions college administrators might consider.

First, keeping tuition and other fees low may be an effective strategy for public colleges and universities in preventing an exodus of highly talented students to private schools. While "lower tuition costs" was a very important factor for 18 percent of all Semifinalists,

it was a very important reason for a majority of those who selected a public institution. The lure of a less expensive education may be one of the more effective recruiting tools officials at public colleges and universities have in competing for highly talented students. Surveys of entering freshmen by the Cooperative Institution Research Program (Astin, 1983) show that, since 1974, there has been an increase in the percentage of first year students who planned to reside with their parents while attending college. This may indicate that an increasing proportion of students either want to or have to commute to college to avoid room and board fees and reduce educational costs. Hence, many talented students may be attracted to institutions where students feel they can earn a degree more cheaply than at a private, more prestigious institution a greater distance from their home. With college expenses likely to continue to rise, a public, in-state school may be an appealing bargain for many scholastically gifted students.

Second, private institutions may be able to increase their attractiveness to academically talented students by sustaining their selectivity, remaining as small as possible, and providing ample opportunity for personal contact with faculty and staff. The survey learned that the quality and size of the student body and the student/faculty ratio were considerably more instrumental in recruiting Semifinalists to private than to public institutions.

This finding has important implications for enrollment management at private schools at a time when the pool of college age youth is expected to decline. Private institutions which attempt to

bolster their enrollment by lowering admission standards risk losing high ability students who prefer to attend a college or university that has demanding entrance requirements. An effective recruiting strategy for private institutions might include the creation of an honors program open only to top students and featuring small classes and independent study.

Third, except for black students and Semifinalists with monetary needs, a more attractive financial award may be less important to academically talented students than many other factors in selecting a college. Nearly half of the Semifinalists surveyed (48 percent) rated a better financial aid offer as not important to their decision to select a particular college; less than 30 percent deemed it very important.

Financial assistance may not be as strong a concern among Semifinalists than other students because of the relative affluence of their families. The highest level of education achieved by parents is a good measure of a family's socioeconomic status, and a large majority of both the fathers and mothers of the survey respondents (86 percent and 72 percent respectively) were reported to have completed at least a bachelor's degree. Higgins (1982) found that most of Indiana's merit scholars hailed from high income families.

These findings suggest that both public and private colleges should consider whether merit scholarships, strictly unrelated to need, are cost-effective ways of wooing talented high school graduates. In this light, administrators at public colleges and at their controlling and coordinating boards need to balance carefully the twin goals of quality and access in distributing limited institution-based aid. To

ease this dilemma, campus and state higher education officials could try to persuade legislators to establish special scholarships for students with both strong scholastic credentials and financial need.

Officials at private institutions need to determine whether students going to a prestigious school select the college because it is a prestigious school - regardless of whether they receive money. Nonetheless, institutions involved in the fierce competition for top black students need to keep in mind that black Semifinalists were apparently more influenced in their choice of a college by a better financial aid award than were other Semifinalists. Hence, schools that offer special scholarships aimed at minority students might find this an effective technique in attracting talented black seniors to their campus.

Finally, both public and private institutions should emphasize in their admission literature and in discussions with prospective students the programs at their school, particularly those in academic areas in which the college is most respected. This would be an appropriate approach in light of the finding that, for every group of Semifinalists in the survey, the overall reputation of the institution and the quality of the program in the student's intended major were instrumental in attracting high school seniors to a campus. Although administrators will risk being accused of favoritism if they try to "sell" particular programs to talented students, the results of this study suggest that this approach may be a more effective recruitment

technique than talking more generally about the institution. In any case, the practice of arranging meetings between promising students and faculty in the academic department of the student's choice should be encouraged.

Colleges also could consider conducting follow-up studies of recent graduates to determine their success in finding employment or continuing their education. Most of the Semifinalists surveyed rated as very important in their college decision the experience of graduates in getting a job or gaining admission to graduate or professional school, and favorable information about these matters would be a valuable resource for admission officials.

Conclusion

This paper has reported upon the factors that were important to National Merit and National Achievement Semifinalists in Maryland in their selection of a postsecondary educational institution. The responses showed that college officials involved in the recruitment of academically gifted students might be more successful in their recruitment efforts by remembering the type of institution they represent as well as the attributes of the seniors they seek to attract. The reasons Semifinalists gave for choosing a college varied on the basis of these two factors. Tuition costs, financial aid offers, the size and quality of the student body, and the proximity of the institution to home were more important to some groups of Semifinalists than others in the choice of a college.

Expanding this study to include Semifinalists from a variety of States would enhance the reliability of the findings and provide a larger number of respondents for conducting detailed analyses of group differences. This might be a fruitful area of inquiry for future research.

In any case, the results of this survey suggest that perhaps the most effective strategy that institutions could implement to increase their share of the pool of academically talented high school seniors would be to emphasize the reputation of their campus and the quality of the programs and services provided. A quiet demonstration, through admission literature and informal campus visits, of the academic strengths of a college may be a more effective way of recruiting academic superstars than whirlwind tours, extensive promotional campaigns, or even lucrative financial aid packages.

Table 1
Comparison of Selected Characteristics of Survey Respondents and all Semifinalists

Characteristic	Respondent Group (N=147)	All Semifinalists (N=344)
Sex		
Male	54%	59%
Female	46	41
County or City of High School		
Montgomery	46%	47%
Baltimore (City and County)	23	24
Howard	12	9
Prince George's	8	8
Anne Arundel	3	3
Harford	3	2
Charles	1	*
St. Mary's	1	1
Washington	1	1
Wicomico	1	1
Other	--	4

*Less than 0.5 percent

Table 2
Percentage of Semifinalists Who Rated Certain Factors as Being Very Important to their Decision to Attend a Postsecondary Institution

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Mean Score
Overall reputation of the college	75%	23%	2%	2.73
Had a superior program in your major	68	26	6	2.62
Attracted by the quality of the student body	54	40	7	2.47
Graduates have reputation for success in finding a job or getting into graduate/professional school	54	30	15	2.39
Impressed by the appearance atmosphere of the campus	46	41	13	2.33
Good student/faculty ratio	41	41	18	2.23
Contacts by the school made a good impression	39	41	20	2.19
Social life at the college	25	55	20	2.06
The size of the student body not too large	34	32	35	1.99
Special programs for academically talented students	30	34	37	1.93
Wanted to live away from home	24	45	31	1.93
Better financial assistance offered	29	23	48	1.82
Had a good graduate program in your intended major	23	25	53	1.70
Knew more about it than other colleges	10	49	41	1.69
Parents(s) felt it was the best choice	12	44	44	1.68
Wanted to go to school in the area school is located	13	35	53	1.60
Tuition costs are less	18	21	61	1.57
Friends recommended it	6	26	67	1.39
Teacher or counselor recommended it	5	29	66	1.39
Wanted to attend college close to home	6	13	81	1.24
Have friends attending the college	2	18	80	1.22
Religious considerations	4	12	84	1.21

Mean Score: 3 = Very Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 1 = Not Important

Table 3
Importance of Certain Factors to the Decision of Semifinalists to Attend a College or University (By Type of Institution)

	Public (N=35)		Private (N=104)	
	% Very Important	Mean Score	% Very Important	Mean Score
Overall reputation of the college	69%	2.69	77%	2.74
Had a superior program in your intended major	73	2.61	66	2.62
Better financial assistance offered	36	1.91	27	1.77
Wanted to live away from home	27	1.94	23	1.92
Attracted by the quality of the student body	24	2.03	63	2.60***
Parents feel it was the best choice	12	1.67	13	1.69
Wanted to attend college close to home	18	1.61	2	1.13***
Have friends attending the college	6	1.47	1	1.15**
Tuition costs are less	51	2.29	6	1.31***
Teacher or counselor recommended it	6	1.38	5	1.42
Knew more about it than other colleges	18	1.97	7	1.60*
Wanted to go to school in the area in which the school is located	22	1.69	10	1.60
Friends recommended it	12	1.42	5	1.39
Special programs for academically talented students	27	2.06	31	1.87*
The size of the student body not too large	6	1.33	43	2.20**
Contacts by the school made a good impression	35	2.15	42	2.22
Had a good graduate program in your intended major	15	1.71	25	1.69*
Religious considerations	3	1.19	4	1.21
Impressed by the appearance or atmosphere of the campus	42	2.27	48	2.35
Graduates have reputation for success in finding a job or getting into graduate/ professional school	42	2.21	57	2.43
Social life at the college	29	2.11	24	2.05
Good student/faculty ratio	21	1.82	47	2.35***

Mean Score: 3 = Very Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 1 = Not Important

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 4
Importance of Certain Factors to the Decision of Semifinalists to Attend a College or University (By Location of Institution)

	Out-of State (N=112)		Maryland (N=27)	
	% Very Important	Mean Score	% Very Important	Mean Score
Overall reputation of the college	77%	2.74	67%	2.67
Had a superior program in your intended major	65	2.59	81	2.73
Better financial assistance offered	28	1.78	36	1.92
Wanted to live away from home	28	2.02	7	1.56*
Attracted by the quality of the student body	61	2.59	19	1.92***
Parents felt it was the best choice	13	1.71	12	1.56
Wanted to attend college close to home	1	1.10	26	1.82***
Have friends attending the college	2	1.19	4	1.41
Tuition costs are less	10	1.42	48	2.15***
Teacher or counselor recommended it	4	1.37	12	1.56
Knew more about it than other colleges	6	1.62	27	2.00**
Wanted to go to school in the area in which the school is located	11	1.63	19	1.58
Friends recommended it	7	1.41	8	1.36
Special programs for academically talented students	31	1.90	23	2.00*
The size of the student body not too large	36	2.08	23	1.62**
Contacts by the school made a good impression	41	2.19	37	2.26
Had a good graduate program in your intended major	22	1.66	22	1.85
Religious considerations	4	1.21	4	1.19
Impressed by the appearance or atmosphere of the campus	50	2.37	31	2.15
Graduates have reputation for success in finding a job or getting into graduate/professional school	56	2.39	46	2.31
Social life at the college	28	2.11	12	1.89
Good faculty/student ratio	45	2.29	21	1.88*

Mean Score: 3 = Very Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 1 = Not Important

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 5
Importance of Certain Factors to the Decision of Semifinalists to Attend a College or University (By Sex)

	Male (N=79)		Female (N=67)	
	% Very Important	Mean Score	% Very Important	Mean Score
Overall reputation of the college	76%	2.73	74%	2.72
Had a superior program in your intended major	62	2.57	76	2.70
Better financial assistance offered	28	1.74	31	1.92
Wanted to live away from home	30	1.97	18	1.89
Attracted by the quality of the student body	54	2.45	54	2.49
Parents felt it was the best choice	8	1.49	17	1.91***
Wanted to attend college close to home	4	1.21	8	1.28
Have friends attending the college	0	1.15	5	1.30
Tuition costs are less	17	1.50	19	1.67
Teacher or Counselor Recommended it	3	1.30	8	1.49
Knew more about it than other colleges	5	1.55	16	1.86*
Wanted to go to school in the area in which the school is located	18	1.67	6	1.53
Friends recommended it	4	1.36	9	1.44
Special programs for academically talented students	29	1.90	31	1.98
The size of the student body not too large	29	1.95	39	2.02
Contacts by the school made a good impression	39	2.23	39	2.14
Had a good graduate program in your intended major	20	1.61	26	1.79
Religious considerations	4	1.18	5	1.24
Impressed by the appearance or atmosphere of the campus	47	2.33	45	2.32
Graduates have reputation for success in finding a job or getting into graduate/professional school	55	2.40	54	2.37
Social life at the college	26	2.08	25	2.03
Good student/faculty ratio	39	2.21	43	2.25

Mean Score: 3 = Very Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 1 = Not Important

*p < .05
***p < .001

Table 6
Importance of Certain Factors to the Decision of Semifinalists to Attend A College or University (By Race)

	White (N=102)		Black (N=26)	
	% Very Important	Mean Score	% Very Important	Mean Score
Overall reputation of the college	76%	2.73	60%	2.60
Had a superior program in your intended major	62	2.55	88	2.83
Better financial assistance offered	29	1.75	44	2.24**
Wanted to live away from home	25	1.96	23	1.92
Attracted by the quality of the student body	56	2.50	44	2.32
Parents felt it was the best choice	10	1.65	12	1.76
Wanted to attend college close to home	8	1.27	0	1.19
Have friends attending the college	2	1.21	0	1.23
Tuition costs are less	18	1.54	27	1.85
Teacher or counselor recommended it	5	1.37	0	1.44
Knew more about it than other colleges	9	1.70	20	1.80
Wanted to go to school in the area in which the school is located	14	1.62	8	1.52
Friends recommended it	8	1.42	0	1.24
Special programs for academically talented students	28	1.95	32	1.96
The Size of the student body not too large	33	1.99	32	1.88
Contacts by the school made a good impression	36	2.16	58	2.35
Had a good graduate program in your intended major	19	1.62	31	1.85
Religious considerations	5	1.23	4	1.20
Impressed by the appearance or atmosphere of the campus	50	2.35	36	2.24
Graduates have reputation for success in finding a job or getting into graduate/professional school	51	2.35	56	2.40
Social life at the college	27	2.04	27	2.23
Good student/faculty ratio	41	2.24	44	2.28

Mean Score: 3 = Very Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 1 = Not Important

**p < .01

Table 7. Relationship Between the Location and Type of Institution Selected by Semifinalists and the Percentage of their First-Year Educational Costs Covered by Financial Aid Package

	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-99%	100%
Location					
Out-of-State (N=112)	53%	12%	13%	12%	9%
Maryland (N=27)	39%	12%	15%	15%	19%
Type					
Public (N=35)	47%	9%	12%	9%	24%
Private (N=104)	52%	13%	14%	14%	6%

Table 8. Relationship Between Sex and Race of Semifinalists and the Percentage of their First-Year Educational Costs Covered by Financial Aid Package

	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-99%	100%
Sex					
Male (N=79)	53%	14%	14%	13%	7%
Female (N=67)	48%	10%	13%	13%	16%
Race					
White (N=102)	53%	13%	12%	13%	11%
Black (N=26)	39%	9%	17%	17%	17%

Table 9

Relationship Between the Importance of Tuition and Financial Aid to College Choice and the Percentage of First-Year Educational Costs Covered by the Financial Aid Package

	Percentage of Cost Covered			
	0% - 25% (N = 69)		26% or Higher (N = 66)	
	% Very Important	Mean Score	% Very Important	Mean Score
Better financial assistance offered	11%	1.35	85%	2.80***
Tuition costs are less	18%	1.58	19%	1.58

Mean Score: 3 = Very Important, 2 = Somewhat Important, 1 = Not Important

***p < .001

REFERENCES

Astin, Alexander W. et al., National Norms for Entering Freshmen - Fall 1983 Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1983.

Chapman, David W. "A Model of Student College Choice," Journal of Higher Education, 52, 2, Sept. - Oct., 1981, pp. 490 - 505.

Douglas, Peggy, Stephen Powers and Melisa Choroszy, "Factors in the Choice of Higher Educational Institutions by Academically Gifted Seniors," Journal of College Student Personnel, 24, 6, November, 1983, pp. 540 - 545.

Feinberg, Lawrence, "Scholarships on Merit Provoke Dispute in Academia," Washington Post, February 6,1984.

Higgins, A. Stephen, "Academic Champions: The 1981 National Merits from Indiana," Journal of Student Financial Aid, 12, 2, May, 1982, pp. 22 - 36.

Litten, Larry H. "Different Strokes in the Applicant Pool," Journal of Higher Education, v. 53, 4, July - August, 1982, pp. 383 - 402.

Maguire, John C. "Factors Influencing Matriculation: A Two-Year Study," Journal of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, v. 26, 1, August, 1981, pp. 7 - 12.

Tierney, Michael L. "Student College Choice Sets: Toward an Empirical Characterization," Research in Higher Education , v. 18, 3, 1983, pp. 271-284.